

Settling in the U.K.

Your Relocation Guide

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1. Planning your relocation

a. What should I know when moving my personal belongings to the UK?

When moving personal belongings to the UK you may need to pay tax and customs duty. For more detailed information on this please check the government's ["Moving personal belongings to the UK"](#) page. Some items may be exempt from customs charges and you can claim Transfer of Residency (TOR) relief on these items.

You will also need to arrange your own transportation for your belongings, either by sea, land, or air. It is a good idea to shop around when deciding on who to use as costs can vary significantly.

b. What is TOR and why do I need a reference number?

TOR is a declaration document, which requires you to fill in personal information, and a UK address, as well as a list and quantity of items you are looking to transport to the UK. Once submitted you will be given a reference number which you will need to claim exemption from paying customs duty. It can take 4-6 weeks for the request to be processed so make sure you apply in plenty of time.

It should be noted that only items that meet the following conditions can apply for tax exemption:

- Items self-used for more than 6 months,
- Items that will continue to be used for personal use for more than 12 months after entry, and cannot be resold, lent, leased, or given to others,
- The item must enter the UK within 12 months of your entry,
- Tobacco, alcohol, and commercial vehicles are not accepted,
- The mechanic tools of decoration and plumbers need to be declared separately.

For more detailed information you can visit the government's [Transfer of Residence website](#), and take a closer look at the [guidance](#).

c. Does the University offer a relocation scheme or allowance?

In some instances, new staff may be offered a relocation allowance to assist with the cost of their relocation to Southampton. Whether you are offered a relocation allowance is at the discretion of your employing faculty or department and will depend on different factors. Any financial assistance offered will be detailed in your letter of appointment. The details of the relocation scheme can be found in the University's [Relocation Scheme Guidelines](#).

d. Can I bring my pet?

Yes, it is possible to bring your pets from overseas, however, please keep in mind that there are some regulations you need to be aware of. For detailed information, please visit the government's [step-by-step guidance](#). If you are flying to the UK, you may find [Airpet](#)'s website quite informative. Airpets is an accredited IATA cargo agent with the ability to make direct bookings with all animal-carrying airlines on behalf of their customers.



Bear in mind not all landlords will let you move in with your pet! Don't forget to pay attention to the letting criteria when making a decision about your accommodation.

e. Can I import my car?

If you wish to import your car from abroad, you must provide documentation for your car to the relevant authorities and register it once it arrives in the UK. In addition, the vehicle must comply with local regulations and be insured. You can find detailed information on the [UK government's car import website](#).

f. What should I know about buying a car?

If you wish to buy either a new or used car, you can use local car dealers or check private sale options online. There are many websites you can visit to check your options such as the [Autotrader](#) website. You may also want to check leasing options if your stay is short term [car leasing explained](#).

All cars must be [taxed](#) and insured and have a [MOT certificate](#) if required. An MOT is an annual test that ensures the vehicle meets road safety and environmental standards and applies to all vehicles over 3 years old. The government has a useful [buy a vehicle checklist](#) on the website.

The University of Southampton has partnered with a leading low emission car salary sacrifice provider, NHS Fleet Solutions, to provide employees with a tax-efficient way to lease a brand new fully electric or ultra-low emission car. So, before you make your decision you might want to wait and discuss your options with the [Reward team](#).



g. Driving and driving licenses

If you have a foreign driving license, you may be able to use it to drive in the UK for a limited period before having to qualify for a UK driving license. For guidance, please visit the UK government website on [driving licenses](#).

- *Do I need a UK driving license to drive? How can I get a UK driving license?*

If your license was issued from a country in the EU or EEA, then you're officially allowed to drive in the UK on your original license. Whilst you are allowed to drive in the UK on your original license, you can still exchange your foreign license for a UK one at any time if you want.

The UK has driving license agreements with a variety of designated countries. If you hold a driving license from one of the countries below, you'll be allowed to exchange it for a UK driving license without taking any further tests:

Andorra, Australia, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Faroe Islands, Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Republic of North Macedonia, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and Zimbabwe.

If your driving license is not issued in any of the above countries, then you **won't** be able to exchange your foreign driving license for a UK one. But don't worry, you can still drive with your original license for up to 12 months, at which point, you will need to take a theory test and practical test to get a UK driving license.

To find out how to exchange your non-British driving license for a British license, you can visit the [government's page](#).

- *What should I pay attention to while driving in the UK?*
 - First, make sure you are driving on the correct side of the road which is the left-hand side.
 - Watch your speed: All speed limits in the UK are in miles per hour, not km/h, and the limits change depending on the kind of vehicle, and area, you are driving in.
 - Don't use your phone. There are strict laws in the UK when it comes to using your phone while driving. It is illegal to use a phone, satellite navigations or any other handheld digital device whilst driving in the UK. Make sure you know the rules by reading the [information on the government webpage](#).
 - It is illegal to drive when under the influence of drugs or alcohol and the UK has very strict laws in this area. Make sure you know the [drink driving penalties](#).
 - Make sure you have vehicle insurance: In the UK, all vehicles must be insured. Take out comprehensive motor insurance **before** you start driving.
 - You can compare insurance deals on price comparison sites such as [comparethemarket.com](#) or [confused.com](#).
 - Beware of roundabouts: Roundabouts are extremely common in the UK, so it's a good idea to familiarise yourself with them before you start driving and make sure you know who has right of way.
 - Seatbelts: In the UK wearing seatbelts in a vehicle is mandatory for both front and rear passengers. Children traveling in cars must use the appropriate child seat or restraint. For further information about seatbelt requirements please visit the [government webpage](#).



Do you wonder why we drive on the left side of the road in the UK while most other countries drive on the right? You may find [this article](#) quite interesting!

2. Arriving in Southampton

a. Airports

There are many airports close to Southampton. You can check flights to Southampton Airport, London Heathrow Airport, London Gatwick Airport, or Bournemouth Airport and then you will need to make your way to the University and your accommodation. You may rent a car and take the train or coach from the airport to Southampton.

b. Railway

On the [National Rail](#) website, you can plan your journey.

c. Coach

On the [National Express](#) website, you can plan your journey.

3. Accommodation

a. Short-term accommodation: Hotels and B&Bs

There are several hotels in and around Southampton. Most of these hotels are located within the city centre, which is about a 15-minute journey by car to the University (several bus services cover the route). More options can be found on hotel booking websites such as [Laterooms](#), [Expedia](#), [Trivago](#), [Kayak](#) and [Booking.com](#).

The University has agreements with a couple of hotels that may offer you special rates for your stay. Contact them direct quoting University of Southampton: [Highfield House Hotel](#), [New Forest Hotels](#).

b. Long-term accommodation: Renting a house

- *Prove your right to rent in England*

In England, landlords are required to check that all tenants who occupy their properties have legal status to live in the UK. This means that before you can rent a home in England, a landlord or letting agent must undertake passport and immigration checks before letting out the property.

If you need to provide proof of your employment to an agency or landlord (proof of earnings), we advise providing your employment contract initially. Once you've received and signed a contract, you'll find this in the [recruitment portal](#) when you log in.

However, if you require an employment reference instead, HR can confirm the basic details of your employment in a letter. To request an employment reference letter, you need to email recruitment@soton.ac.uk.

If you are trying to arrange a tenancy from abroad, landlords can agree on a tenancy in principle subject to an ID check on arrival.

If the Home Office is holding your documents because of an ongoing application, your landlord (or letting agent) can request to carry out a Right to Rent check. This can be done via an online form or by calling the Landlords Helpline on 0300 069 9799, they will need your Home Office reference number to do this.

You can visit the ["Prove Right to Rent" government website](#) for further information.

- *What is the best way to search for accommodation?*

Webpages

The most popular websites for long-term accommodation search are [Rightmove](#), [Zoopla](#), and [Gumtree](#).

Letting agents and Estate agents

Letting agents are responsible solely for the residential rental market. Whereas estate agents can deal with rental properties as well as selling properties.

Here, you can find a [list of letting and estate agents](#).

Good to know:

Letting agents must be a member of a [redress scheme](#). You should check which independent redress scheme the agent is a member of in case you have an unresolved dispute.

If they receive money from you such as rent payments, you should also check if they are a member of a [client money protection scheme](#). By law, this information should also be visible at the agent's premises and on their website.

Reputable agents are often accredited through a professional body such as ARLA, Propertymark, GPP, Safeagent, RICS, or UKALA.

- *What are my rights and responsibilities as a tenant?*

Below you may find answers to the most common questions, but for detailed information about [your rights as a tenant](#), you can visit and read the Government website.

Is the landlord or letting agent allowed to charge any fees for holding the property, viewing the property, or setting up a tenancy agreement?

Since 1 June 2019, most fees charged in connection with a tenancy are banned. A charge to reserve a property is permitted but it must be refundable, and it cannot equate to more than 1 week's rent. Read more about [permitted fees](#).

How much should the deposit be?

Since 1 June 2019, there has also been a limit on the deposit that the tenant is required to pay at the start of the tenancy. If the total annual rent is less than £50,000, the maximum deposit is 5 weeks' rent. If the annual rent is £50,000 or above, the maximum deposit is 6 weeks' rent. The deposit must be refundable at the end of the tenancy.

How much will my rent be?

Of course, the answer depends on your preferences, and the choice of area. While deciding you should consider your monthly salary, savings, and running costs – to have a rough idea about expenses visit [Money Helper's how much rent can you afford page](#).

- *Understanding tenancy contracts*

Legal documents can be very complicated and overwhelming, especially if you are signing a contract in a new country, to get to know more please visit the [Government's tenancy agreements website](#).

c. Long-term accommodation: Buying a house

Buying a property in the UK can be a lengthy and complex process, taking on average between 3-4 months to complete and it is a good idea to seek independent legal and financial advice before you do so. There are significant costs on top of the purchase price of the property. Be sure you visit the [Government's buy your home page](#) for further information.

Most sales in the UK are handled by estate agents. Unlike in most other countries, you will not need to pay a finder's fee in the UK to your agent. You need to register on their mailing lists, search through online listings ([RightMove](#), [Zoopla](#), [Gumtree](#)) and contact the estate agent when you find a property you want to view.

d. Housing expenses and monthly bills

Monthly bills will apply when renting or buying a property. In some rental cases some of your bills may be included in the monthly fee. Always check to make sure you know what you will be expected to pay out for.

- *Council tax*

Council Tax is a local tax, set by councils to help pay for local services. It applies to all domestic properties, including houses, bungalows, flats, maisonettes, mobile homes, or houseboats, whether owned or rented. If you would like to know [How Council Tax Works](#), please visit the government website.

- *Water*

In the Hampshire region there are several water providers. Your landlord should inform you about your provider.

- *Energy*

There are many gas and electricity suppliers in the UK. When you move into your new home there should already be electricity and (in most cases) also a gas supplier. Some rented properties also include energy bills in the monthly rental. But if you need to decide on your supplier, there are price comparator websites so that you can check that you are getting the best deal: [EnergyHelpline](#), [MoneySuperMarket](#), [USwitch](#).

Don't forget to take the meter readings when you first move into your new home to ensure that you only pay for the energy you use.

- *Home telephone*

There are many home telephone providers in the UK. You can compare prices at [Home Phone Choices](#).

- *Broadband*

There is a large variety of broadband providers in the UK.

[Moneysupermarket.com](#) is a price comparison website that gives details of the best deals available for home broadband.

[uSwitch](#) is a free comparison site helping you to save money, by finding the best deals available in your area.

- *Mobile phones*

There are various mobile phone companies in the UK with various pricing. It all depends on your needs of course but you can make price comparisons on [Moneysupermarket.com](#) and [HandsetExpert](#).

Don't forget to check the network coverage of your chosen supplier as this can differ depending on your location.

- *Television*

If you watch or record shows as they're being shown on TV (i.e. live TV), or you use on-demand services such as BBC iPlayer you need to be covered by a [tv license](#).

If you don't have a licence or fail to repay your arrears, you could receive a court fine. TV licenses can be purchased online and must be renewed yearly.

4. Banking, Tax and National Insurance Number

a. How do I open a UK bank account?

Banks in the UK are legally obliged to undertake identity and address verification, which may lead to a delay in individuals from outside the UK opening a UK bank account. Please check with your chosen bank the documentation they require before you visit a branch. They will normally require proof of a UK residential address such as a tenancy agreement and a letter from the University confirming your employment details.

There are several online banking providers such as [Monzo](#) and [Starling Bank](#). Their documentation requirements are less compared to other banks, and you can open an account and claim a debit card by using their mobile application process.

b. How can I transfer money to the UK?

Many specialist companies provide money transfer services, such as [Western Union](#), [Wise](#), or [Revolut](#).

Traveller's cheques are another option, as they can be purchased in your home country and then exchanged for local currency when abroad, often free of charge.

Most shops in the UK accept credit cards from other countries. You should check the terms and conditions outlined in your credit card agreement, as you may incur fees for using your card abroad.

c. The tax system in the UK and where to find advice?

Tax systems can be very complicated but non-UK nationals are subject to relatively straightforward rules in the UK. Employees pay [Income Tax](#) and [National Insurance](#). Employees are taxed on a PAYE ('Pay As You Earn') basis. The following link provides further information. [Tax rates](#) are set by the government and will vary according to your income.

d. What is National Insurance (NI) and do I need a NI number?

NI is a tax on earnings that funds the NHS and gives you access to certain benefits. A NI number is used to ensure your NI contributions and taxes are recorded against your name only. It's made up of letters and numbers and never changes. All employees require a NI number and you can [apply for a NI number](#) online.

5. Healthcare System

a. Access to the healthcare system

In the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) provides healthcare to residents (including EU/EEA citizens with settled or pre-settled status) or who have paid the [Immigration Health Surcharge](#) as part of their visa application.

After moving to the UK, you should register with your nearest health centre. You will then be assigned a general practitioner (GP), who will oversee your routine medical care. To learn [how to register with a GP](#), please visit the NHS website. For basic healthcare, at a GP practice or a hospital, there are no charges. If you need prescription medicines, or dental or eye treatment, you may be required to pay some or all the cost.

b. Private healthcare

The NHS provision should be sufficient for most healthcare needs, but in some circumstances, it may be advisable to take out additional cover for you and your family.

The University of Southampton's [healthcare plan](#) puts you in control, giving you the freedom to shape a healthcare plan that's built around you and your family. Once you start your employment you can contact the Reward team for further details.

c. Emergency medical services

To call an ambulance, dial 999 from a landline, or 112 from a mobile. Most health centres offer 'emergency' appointments or walk-in clinics if you need a same-day consultation for a medical condition that is not life-threatening.

d. Out of hours medical services

If you ever need health support out of service hours, you can contact the NHS Direct advice line on 111 and can organise out-of-hours care from GPs, community nurses, or paramedics as appropriate. The [NHS website](#) gives information on the most common conditions, along with their treatments, or you can consult your local pharmacist for advice about minor illnesses.

e. Dental care

There are subsidised dental services available through the NHS. Children receive free treatment, as do people who meet certain criteria. You can [check your eligibility](#) online. It can be difficult to find a good dental practice that has spaces for NHS patients, so ask colleagues or neighbours for recommendations. If you have private healthcare insurance, you should check whether this includes dental cover.

f. Pharmacies

Pharmacists are experts in medicines who can help you with minor health concerns. As qualified healthcare professionals, they can offer clinical advice and over-the-counter medicines for a range of minor illnesses, such as coughs, colds, sore throats, tummy trouble and aches and pains.

If symptoms suggest it's something more serious, pharmacists have the right training to make sure you get the help you need. For example, they will tell you if you need to see a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional.

You can [search for nearest pharmacies](#) online by entering your postcode.